

the realm," are several; some of a prospective, and others of a retrospective operation.

The first measure they recommend is, a general Building Act, applicable to towns now, or at any future time, comprising a certain amount of population; laying down regulations respecting the construction of certain rates of houses (well understood among builders) which are fitted for the dwellings of the working classes.

The regulations would be framed so as to interfere no farther with every one's right to manage his own property than was necessary to protect the health of the community; nor would they extend beyond what the necessity of that urgent duty of Government justified. Such regulations would fall strictly under that rule of public law universally acknowledged, which lays down as a maxim, "*Sic utere tuo ut alienum laedas.*"

These regulations would forbid and prevent such forms of construction specified, as experience and undoubted testimony shew to be inconsistent with health. These would embrace,

1. Cellar dwellings, unless with areas in front and back, and with sewers, below the level of the floors.

2. Rows of houses erected in close courts, built up at the end.

3. Rows of dwellings built back to back, so as to prevent any thorough ventilation.

These regulations so far would be of a preventive character, and would not otherwise interfere with the discretion of builders.

There are, however, a few other rules which ought to be introduced into such an Act; one of the most important is, to require that before and behind every row of houses of this description a certain space should be left open, proportioned to the height of the houses. What this proportion should be would be matter of consideration. Experienced builders, who have given evidence before your committee (and who are unanimous in opinion as to the necessity of such a provision), differ slightly as to details, one proposing the space in front should be the height of the houses themselves, whilst another thinks two-thirds might be sufficient; and, in like measure, with regard to the space necessary to be left open at the back of these small houses.

Some provisions have likewise been suggested as proper to be inserted in a Building Act, which might insure to these humble classes of houses such conveniences as are absolutely necessary for health and decency, and such receptacles for refuse, ashes, &c., as cannot be dispensed with consistent with cleanliness and comfort. There should also be a sufficient underground drain communicating with the common sewer.

Some other beneficial provisions may probably be sanctioned as proper for a general Building Act; but these are the only new provisions which appear to your committee essentially necessary for the welfare of the working classes.

Regulations as to the thickness of party-walls, to hinder the spread of fires, and others to prevent overhanging projections and dangerous chimneys, are now in the Building Act applicable to the metropolis, and probably in some provincial Acts, and would of course be necessary.

In these suggestions your committee have kept in view the policy of interfering as little as possible with private property, and no farther than the strict necessity of the case justified.

There is in the evidence abundant proof of the absolute want of some such provisions, and of the wide-spread evils and misery resulting from their neglect. They are in the nature strictly of sanitary regulations, and are only the fulfilment of one of the first duties of a humane government, to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

It is matter of deep regret to your committee that some such Act as they suggest did not engage the attention of Parliament at the beginning of the century, before our great towns were so densely populated, and so many dwellings for the working classes had been built in contravention of the proposed rules; had such been the case, they cannot doubt but much of the discomfort and sufferings which have been detailed before them would have been prevented.

Your committee are informed that some years since a general Building Act, which

would probably have contained some regulations like those they recommend, was under the consideration of the government; but, amid the changes which subsequently took place, was laid aside.

The obvious necessity of some such enactment, arising from the evils detailed before your committee, might perhaps justify them in simply but earnestly recommending it to the consideration of Parliament; but feeling, as they do, the great importance of its speedy adoption for the benefit of a rapidly increasing and valuable class of their humbler fellow-subjects, they are induced to consider and reply to some objections which might be brought against it.

It may be said, that such regulations as have been spoken of, forbidding buildings being erected in certain forms considered prejudicial to health, is an interference with private property. This is doubtless the case, but appears to be amply justified on the plea of the general good; and the same necessity is constantly held to justify similar interference, in various Acts of Parliament for the construction of roads, railways, canals, and in the enforcement of regulations regarding police, quarantine, &c.

A more serious objection is, that such regulations, by throwing some difficulties in the way of erecting closely-packed dwellings for the working classes, would render them dearer than at present, and increase the difficulty which they often find to procure habitations in populous cities. With respect to such part of the proposed regulations as would insure a better arrangement of dwellings on the same space (as by insuring courts and streets to be open at each end), this objection would not apply. But undoubtedly the effect of some of the rules suggested for a Building Act would be to improve the dwellings of the working classes, but at a greater cost than before.

The evidence, however, of experienced builders leads your committee to believe that this cost would not be very materially increased by prospective regulations of the nature described. The cost of a little increased space of ground before it is built upon, and before additional value is given to it by the proximity of manufactories, shops, roads, and streets, is very different and much less than afterwards; but the rules suggested would apply to it when open, and thus comparatively of less cost.

The outlay on the houses themselves in construction and materials (which are the main points of cost) might be the same, whether there are 20 or 15 on the same number of square yards; yet the effect on the health and comfort of the inmates would be very different in one case from the other. Still it must be admitted, that if a larger space of ground is required for a given number of dwellings, and they are constructed in a better and more costly manner, and have appendant to them some conveniences which they are now without, that the rent to be paid for them must be somewhat higher; but your committee assert with confidence, that this addition will be amply compensated to the working classes by the additional convenience and comfort they will enjoy, and that they will gain in freedom from disease, which now so frequently attacks them and their children, a saving greatly exceeding their outlay. The chief property of these persons is their labour. The evidence shews how often this is interrupted by fevers and other disorders, arising from the causes adverted to. Regulations, therefore, which may protect them from these evils, and allow them the uninterrupted advantage of the wages derived from their labour, would more than make up to them some augmentation of rent.

It must be borne in mind that without some such improvement in the construction of his dwelling, and the conveniences appendant to it, as are suggested, it is almost impossible for a working man's home to be made comfortable, or to have any attractions for him, or that he can in any way make the most of his daily earnings, and he is thereby driven to drinking as a resource, as it is stated by many witnesses examined.

Another remedial measure, which appears to your committee absolutely necessary to facilitate proper sanitary regulations in great

towns, is a general Act for the sewerage of these densely-peopled communities.

At present these Acts are partial in their operation and extent, varying in their provisions, and very defective in the powers they give.

A reference to the evidence collected by your committee will shew how great has been the neglect of the sewerage and drainage in some of the most densely-peopled parts of London, and the large provincial towns, and how much misery and disease have been entailed on the poorer classes of inhabitants in consequence. It cannot be denied, however, that considerable attention has been directed to this point within the last twelve years, and that great improvements have been effected during that period; still the want of any general system of operation, and the defective powers possessed by the commissioners, both in the metropolis and country towns, in which they have been established by local Acts, have altogether prevented the extension and construction of sewers, upon a scale commensurate with the increase of population. Your committee cannot help repeating their conviction, that, in addition to the physical evil, which this want of the means of carrying off the refuse and impurities from their dwellings entails upon the poorer classes, it is impossible to deny, from the evidence before them, that their moral habits are affected by the same causes. That a constant residence in a tainted and polluted atmosphere, whilst it predisposes them to disease, and renders them less able to repel its attacks, also produces a degradation of moral character, an indifference to the common decencies of life, and an utter recklessness of all those comforts which persons in their station might be expected to enjoy.

The effect of this utter prostration of energy, and of all the better feelings of the mind, has been to reduce multitudes, who might otherwise have passed with credit through their humble spheres, to have recourse to ardent spirits as a desperate alleviation of their wretchedness; and your committee need hardly point out, how surely this irresistible temptation leads, step by step, to habitual dissipation and debauchery.

Your committee are perfectly aware, that wherever large masses of the labouring orders are collected together in towns, it is almost hopeless to enforce that strict attention to household cleanliness which is maintained amongst those of the same rank in rural districts; but it is for this very reason, and to counteract this unfortunate tendency to neglect of cleanliness and comfort, that your committee deem it essential that every practicable means should be adopted to provide, at all events, against the worst of the evils detailed in evidence before them, and due sanitary regulations, to place the poorer classes in a condition to avail themselves, by a little exertion, of those conveniences which experience has proved necessary to remove the accumulated impurities of large towns.

In pursuance of these principles, and with the view of affording to the poorer classes congregated in towns some protection from the evils to which, from the confined nature of their dwellings, and the cupidity of speculators, they are frequently exposed, your committee are of opinion that it would be advisable to establish, in every town containing a population of a certain amount, a Board of Health, whose duty it should be to examine into such circumstances and occurrences within their district as are prejudicial to the general health of the inhabitants; to call the attention of the Commissioners of Sewers, and any other local authorities that might be concerned, to such nuisances, and to devise and suggest remedies. They should report their proceedings annually to the Central Board of Health, if such a board be constituted, and if not, to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for presentation to Parliament, by which means publicity would be insured to their proceedings, and much useful information collected and diffused. These Boards of Health might be appointed by the Boards of Guardians, or by the Town Councils in corporate towns, or directed by the rate-payers.

It is obvious that a portion of such Boards should always consist of members of the medical profession, and your committee are inclined to think, that a class of persons per-